

# Making Of Teen Idol, Cassidy, Strictly Big Business

By DAVID LAMB

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — They came at him as if on cue, the flashbulbs on their Instamatic cameras popping furiously, thousands of girls intent on nothing less than mauling, maiming or at least touching David Cassidy.

Their pounding feet echoed through Al-

buquerque's tin-roofed Coliseum and they reached the stage just moments behind three husky cops, who scooped up the 125-pound Cassidy, rushed him to a nearby limousine, wailing with doors open and motor running, and flung him headfirst into the back seat.

The driver stepped hard on the accelerator and the black Cadillac sped into the night, leaving behind a throng of girls who clutched \$2 David Cassidy posters, \$1 David Cassidy photo albums and \$1 David Cassidy love kits, who chewed Partridge Family bubble gum and wore David Cassidy dresses, David Cassidy blouses and David Cassidy shirts, a few who even carried David Cassidy coloring books and David Cassidy lunch boxes covered with David Cassidy "LOVE" stickers ("include 25 cents extra for rush handling").

Nickel and dime stuff? Not at all. The marketing of a teen-age idol has come a long way since the days of Rickie Nelson, Frankie Avalon and Fabian. It's strictly big business, shrewdly promoted and skillfully merchandised.

Consider, for example, 21-year-old Cassidy — also known as Daru Enterprises,

Inc. — who plays Keith Partridge, 16, on ABC-TV's Partridge Family series. And consider the spending power of his pre-teen audience, an audience considerably younger, wealthier and more exploited than that which swooned over, say, Bobby Rydell, a decade ago.

In a single day last month, the four Partridge Family record albums on the market sold a combined total of 200,000 copies. (A store can buy a record for \$2.25 and sell it for \$1.98 with the performer getting from one per cent to nine per cent and the producer from one per cent to four per cent.

Screen Gems, the television subsidiary of Columbia Pictures which owns the Partridge Family, has earned over \$100,000 from bubblegum royalties this year "and we'll quietly make a fortune on a new line of Partridge Family dresses," a top executive said.

Cassidy, who draws a weekly allowance of \$150 from his business manager, Lee Buch, but stands to earn over \$250,000 after expenses this year, recently grossed \$58,000 for one-night concerts in Amarillo, Tex., and Albuquerque (before the promoter's share and \$20,000 expenses, including a \$1,-

100 chartered return flight to Los Angeles.)

As a result of Cassidy's popularity, six-figure deals are negotiated, people struggle to get close to him and related employment extends from New York's record promoters and fan magazine publishers to Hollywood, where Mikal Bales works nearly fulltime designing his show clothes (always white in keeping with the "youthful purity" of his image), often spending an entire week stringing thousands of decorative beads on 20-pound test fish lines to be sewed on Cassidy's concert costumes.

So fierce does the competition become for a piece of the action that when Cassidy's contract expired with a talent agency 18 months ago, Ruth Aarons, president of Aarons Management, Inc., which represents Cassidy, tells of being offered \$125,000 "front" money, a sizable under-the-table bonus and a promise of hidden interests in future deals, if she would sign with a certain new agency.

"The word spread like a virus that David's contract was available," she said. "People just started coming out of the woodwork."

In some ways, the most difficult promotion problems are over. For Cassidy, like Bobby Sherman, Donnie Osmond and a handful of other teenybopper stars, have long since made it. But why them? Are they the creation of a public relations genius like the late George Evans who paid "bobbysaxers" \$2 an afternoon to squeal over Frank Sinatra outside the Paramount Theater in New York 30 years ago?

"There's a look to what kind of face is marketable these days," said Cassidy's personal manager, Jim Flood.

"With David, it's a positive sexual quality, a youthful, clean-cut look that is threatening neither physically nor emotionally to young girls."

In the spring, Miss Aarons and Flood will move Cassidy from the tank-town circuit to large auditoriums only in major cities. The hysteria over a young star seldom lasts much longer than two years, they say, and already they are casting about for a solid movie that will challenge Cassidy's acting ability and elevate him from the teenybopper level, a role some other performer and his agent always wait to fill.

Only last month, in fact, the baleful face of 20-year-old Michael Gray ("to hear his husky, sexy voice and look into his deep green-gray eyes will entrance you!") peered from the pages of *Tiger Beat*.

The teaser headline asked: "he's alone ... he's lonely ... can you love him?" Thousands of girls wrote to say they could. Some of them, perhaps, would even be interested in bubblegum bearing his name.